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Francis J. Parker

MEMOIR

OF

FRANCIS JEWETT PARKER

BY

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FRANCIS JEWETT PARKER

Francis Jewett Parker was born in Boston March 3, 1825, and died there January 20, 1909. He was descended from Abraham[1] Parker, one of the original settlers of Chelmsford, Mass., and a freeman in 1645, through Moses,[2] Samuel,[3] Aaron,[4] Isaac,[5] Abel,[6] and Isaac[7]. His grandfather Judge Abel Parker of Jaffrey, N. H., married Edith, daughter of Jedediah Jewett of Pepperell, Mass., and granddaughter of Joseph Jewett of Groton, Mass. Francis Jewett Parker was the son of Isaac and Sarah (Ainsworth) Parker of Jaffrey, N. H.

Isaac Parker, who had declined "to go to college" as three of his brothers had gone, came to Boston from Keene, N. H., in 1817, established himself in business, and early took up with "store keeping." Selling manufactures of wool and cotton "by the piece" was the beginning of the commission and mill agency business which has been continued by successors of the firm of Isaac Parker and Company to the present time.

Francis Parker's education was mainly pursued through the public schools of Boston, ending at the English High School, with one year at the Latin School. Judging by some notes made by Col. Parker quite late in life, he did not specially endear himself to Masters Dillaway, Oliver, or Sherwin by his proficiency in any of the branches taught; indeed there was one year's enforced absence which was spent at a private school.

He married, April 28, 1846, Anna Whitney, daughter of Josiah Dwight Lyman of Northfield, Mass. Three children were born to them, Frank Vose Parker, Clara V. Parker, and Elizabeth Lyman Parker. Frank V. Parker married Mary Codman, and their daughter, Gertrude Codman Parker, married, March 23, 1903, Sir Gilbert Thomas Carter, then Governor of the Bahama Islands, and now Governor of Barbadoes. Frank V. Parker died in 1903. Elizabeth Lyman Parker married William Brooks Cabot, now residing at Dublin, N. H. Clara V. Parker resides at Jaffrey, N. H.

Col. Parker's career in mercantile life was most honorable, as was that of all his forbears. He was long associated with the business of cotton manufacturing and the sale of mill products. At one time he was a member of the firm of Parker, Wilder, Parker and Company, and was also treasurer for a time of the Monadnock Manufacturing Company.

Mr. Parker pursued his mercantile vocation, finding in it that training in practical affairs which enabled him to become a good citizen, a brave soldier, and a Christian gentleman, and by studious reading qualifying for the society of scholars, which is usually reserved to the recipient of academic degrees. Civic affairs also received his attention, and he served the City of Boston in its Common Council in 1856, in the Senate of Massachusetts in 1858, and as Representative to the General Court from Boston in 1861.

On the breaking out of the Civil War, Governor Andrew appointed Mr. Parker Major of the First Battalion, Massachusetts Infantry. In November, 1861, the battalion was sent to Fort Warren where Mason and Slidel and some eight hundred Confederate soldiers were confined. Major Parker was advanced to Lieutenant Colonel in May, 1862, and the battalion was ordered to Washington to join the Army of the Potomac. Col. Parker's army experience has been told in his "History of the 32d Massachusetts Infantry."

In 1877 Col. Parker went to live in Newton. His mature judgment and experience in affairs made him a force in this progressive suburban city. He was drafted into the service of his townsmen as one of three commissioners for the introduction of water in 1874–5, and remained until February, 1878, by which time the water system had been well established.

Though a Democrat, he was chosen Senator from the 4th Middlesex District, being elected in a Republican stronghold over his contestant. He recalled that in 1858 he was the youngest, and in 1876 the oldest, member of the Senate. In 1881–2 Col. Parker was one of a commission for the revision of the city charter of Newton, advocating in a minority report the adoption of one board of aldermen with the mayor.

On coming to Newton, he identified himself with Grace Church (Episcopal) Parish, and was an active member of the building committee for the construction of the new church building in 1871–2. An appreciative criticism of Col. Parker's churchmanship at this period comes to us from the rector, Rev. George Wolfe Shinn, D.D., who says: "It would be impossible to understand Col. Parker and the work he did unless we take account of the fact that he was not only a religious man, but intensely so. He was brought up in the Congregational faith, but came into the Episcopal Church bringing with him what he had learned of religion as the source of personal integrity and then taking hold most eagerly of the doctrine of the corporate life of Christians in the Church of Christ. It makes a good combination—downright old Puritanism and staunch Episcopacy. We saw both in him, for he carried his religion into everyday life and he rejoiced to be in the fellowship of a religious body which he believed, with all his heart, to be a branch of the historic Church. He was not a demonstrative religious man in the sense of speaking freely to others of his personal religious experiences.

He preferred to put his faith into deeds and by uprightness of life and by the rectitude of his affairs, whatever he did, carry out the teachings of our Lord. It would be hard to overstate the intensity of his affection for the Episcopal Church and the enjoyment he gained from participating in its services and usages. He became so strong a Churchman that some who were less ardent could not always understand his position. Many friends will long cherish the memory of a kindly, gracious presence, almost always cheerful, sometimes brilliant with humor, ready to express condemnation of what he thought was wrong and equally ready to advocate what he believed to be right. The world would be better and society and business life would be purer if there were more men like Col. Parker."

Col. Parker in middle life was widely interested in public affairs, and his printed papers, criticisms, and discussions cover a wide range of subjects. He expressed himself with vigor and, though often in the minority, was undeterred by opposition. The Tuesday Club at Newton furnished a favorite opportunity for the expression of his views, and its records show the following titles of essays by him: Towns and Their Government Works, The Liquor Question, Smith's History of Newton, The Pilgrim and Puritan, Trial by Jury and Courts of Law, Disestablishment. Col. Parker compiled the Genealogy of the Ainsworth Families of America. He wrote in reviews The Huguenots, The Holy Eastern Church, The Mexican Empire (Maximilian), and the American Union.

Mr. Samuel B. Rindge, of the firm of Parker, Wilder and Company, dying intestate, Col. Parker was appointed one of the administrators, and he was for many years associated with Mr. Frederick H. Rindge as agent and advisor in the direction of the benefactions of this large estate. It was in this latter position that this man of affairs, of sound business judgment, was able to influence the moral and material interests of a large neighboring city with a self-effacing zeal none the less beneficent because not generally recognized by the public.

Col. Parker furnished to volume three of the New England Historic Genealogical Society's Memorial Biographies a sketch of Isaac Parker, his father, a notable man, as was his grandfather, Judge Abel Parker. Col. Parker wrote of his grandfather, "Judge Abel Parker, the father of Isaac, was a man of commanding presence, at once dignified and courteous, one with whom intimacy would seem to have been difficult, and trifling impossible. His ideas of personal integrity and individual honor were of the strictest, and he possessed a marvellous self-reliance, both in thought and action. What he once decided to be right was the thing to be done, and so far as his influence went, it was done. Military taste and patriotic impulse had made him a soldier in early manhood; faithful service with diligent study had raised him in rank, first in the army, and afterward in civil life, and it was his cherished boast that of the many honors

and offices which he had received or occupied not one had been the result of his own solicitation or request. The contrast between the Judge and his wife [Edith (Jewett) Parker of Pepperell] was a marked one. She was active and impulsive, quick to sympathize with all about her; gifted with a keen perception of the humorous and with a gladsome and kindly spirit which enabled her at all times to bring cheer and courage to the despondent or the timid. Straightforward performance of duty was the first principle with the Judge and earnest sympathy was the leading characteristic of the Judge's wife. Their household was a busy one. In it old time family discipline was maintained, religious duties were honored by observance, and its members were bound each to the other by ties of love and by respect for duty. Under such home influences the character of Isaac Parker was formed and moulded. In him were blended the characteristics of both his parents and to such effect that Judge Jeremiah Smith, a man not given to unnecessary compliment, said of him that 'Isaac Parker was the only young man that he ever saw who did not need to be made over.'"

Of Isaac Parker the Hon. Marshall P. Wilder, a business associate for many years, wrote: "As a merchant and citizen of Boston, the memory of Isaac Parker will be cherished by all who knew him. In all the relations of life, whether public or private, he had the reputation of a high sense of honor and unbending integrity. His moral, political, and religious sentiments were matters of fixed and controlling conviction. He was always anxious to do right and to be just. He was very considerate, conservative, and cautious, but having come to a conclusion, he was as immovable as the granite hills of his native state. He was very industrious, systematic, and punctual, and dispatched business with facility but never without deliberation. He had at heart the best interests of humanity, and was ever ready to bestow his influence for the improvement of those around him. He was eminently a peacemaker, never having controversies, if possible to avoid them, and was anxious to do to others as he would have them do to him. Mr. Parker was remarkable for the uniformity of his character, and he will long be remembered in the annals of Boston as one of her distinguished merchants, as one of her pioneers in the traffic of domestic fabrics, and as one notable for his integrity, firmness, and good judgment,—in short as an enlightened merchant and a Christian gentleman."

In contemplating the career and character of these three generations of the Parker family, we come to a new appreciation of and pride in the sterling values of the New England civilization, a product of Puritan and Pilgrim inheritance.

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